

Testimony of the MCCPTA AVP for Walter Johnson, BCC and Whitman Clusters

Montgomery County Public Hearing: FY24 Capital Budget and supplemental appropriations to the FY23 Capital Budget and amendments to the FY23-28 CIP

February 7, 2022

Thank you to the Council for the opportunity to testify. My name is Nermine Demopoulos, and I am the MCCPTA AVP representing the Walter Johnson (WJ), Bethesda Chevy Chase (BCC) and Whitman Clusters. Congratulations to all the new Council Members with a special welcome to Council Member Sayles and Council Member Stewart who represent our clusters.

We are supportive and grateful for the Board of Education's CIP request which includes the reopening of Woodward, and we look forward to working with both the BOE and County Council to complete the project.

WJ Cluster Coordinators who preceded me testified before this Council more than a decade ago urging that a solution be found to the looming overcrowding crisis our high school would face. I first began to advocate for a solution to the overcrowding in 2016, when my daughter was a second grader. I saw, as others did, that WJ was facing a capacity crisis.

My daughter is a ninth grader, and even if this CIP amendment is approved, as we beg that it will be, it will not help her. Woodward High School will open too late for her.

But it won't be too late for WJ and DCC families with younger kids who are dependent upon Woodward to ease overcrowding at area schools.

Construction costs have gone up, due to national and international factors, but also due to state mandates, overlapping interests and delays. Just one example: contractors are on site for Phase 1. Delaying Phase 2 means paying those contractors whether they are building or not.

Additionally, there is a request from MCPS in front of the County Executive for a tiny parcel of scrub trees that has always been intended for school use or development but which has yet to be returned to MCPS.

We know that the cost of major capital projects like Woodward are a strain on the CIP. However, they are also essential. Woodward is mentioned in the Rock Spring Master Plan, the Bethesda Master Plan, the Lyttonsville Sector Plan, all three White Flint Sector Plans, and the Grosvenor-Strathmore Minor Master Plan Amendment as the capacity solution for high school overcrowding in Bethesda, Rockville, Silver Spring, Kensington and everywhere in between.

We urge the Council to engage directly with your fellow political leaders at the County and State level to ensure that this project and the MCPS CIP is fully funded.

There are multiple other projects within both BCC and WJ that are needed as part of the CIP, but I would like to briefly transition to Whitman's safety and ADA concerns at Burning Tree ES.

Burning Tree ES is severely out of ADA compliance. An ADA Assessment performed in 2019 found 47 barriers to accessibility in and around the building that is aging and has a split-level structure with no chair lifts. Teachers have been observed having to physically carry students in wheelchairs and leg braces, which is a hazard to both parties and embarrassing to the student.

The CIP has both big ticket financial needs and smaller financial needs. It is essential to fully fund the Board of Education request so that each and every MCPS project needed across the County can be completed.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.